

August 14, 1944

Ten weeks after Allied forces stormed the beach at Normandy, life at Fort Lawton was hectic. With

German forces on the run, attention turned to the war in the Pacific and plans for a possible invasion of Japan. The fort was under the jurisdiction of the Seattle Port of Embarkation, which, in turn, reported to the U.S. Army's Transportation Dept. Thousands of soldiers and millions of pounds of supplies, weapons and equipment

passed through the port, most of it headed to the war zone in New Guinea, where General Douglas McArthur was working his way toward the Philippines.

The U.S. Army was still segregated in 1944; African American soldiers trained, ate and slept in separate quarters. Of the hundreds of black soldiers assigned to Fort Lawton, most were placed in port companies, trained to load and unload cargo from transport ships. Most all-black companies were under the command of white officers; opportunities for promotion were limited. Although army regulations prohibited outright racial discrimination, black soldiers were treated as second-class citizens, both on the fort and off.

The African American barracks were adjacent to barracks reserved for Italian prisoners of war. Although Italy had surrendered eleven months earlier, German forces

still occupied much of Italy, and its former soldiers could not safely be transported home. Under the rules of the Geneva Convention, the U.S. Army was entitled to put the Italians to work. Men who swore allegiance to the Allies were issued American-style uniforms and paid the same wages as U.S. soldiers. The two hundred soldiers in the 28th Italian Service

Unit at Fort Lawton worked as cooks, janitors, gardeners and mechanics. Under pressure from the new post-Mussolini government, the Italians were granted a range of privileges, including visitations from members of Seattle's Italian-American community and even day passes to stroll around downtown Seattle or to accept invitations to eat meals in private homes. Many Americans—civilian and military—openly resented what they considered “coddling” of men who were still technically POWs.



On the night

of August 14, 1944, two hundred soldiers packed their bags, readying to ship overseas the next day. All the soldiers were African American, members of two all-black port companies quartered in segregated barracks in a remote northwest sector of Fort Lawton.

At 11:00pm, a bugle sounded taps, signaling lights-out. Minutes later, a black American soldier and an Italian prisoner of war briefly scuffled; the American was knocked out cold. His fellow soldiers, mistakenly believing their unit was under attack, rushed to the adjacent Italian area, and a violent clash ensued. It took more than forty minutes for military policemen to arrive; by then, dozens of men had been wounded, many seriously.

At dawn the next morning, two military policemen on patrol discovered the lifeless body of Italian private Guglielmo Olivotto, hanging by a noose from an obstacle course at the bottom of the steep cliffs of Magnolia Bluffs. An army autopsy concluded that the 32-year-old Italian had not committed suicide.

On November 16, 1944, the largest and longest army court-martial of World War II got under way. Forty-three soldiers—all of them African Americans—were charged with rioting. Three were also charged with murder, and faced the death penalty if convicted. A separate U.S. Army investigation by Gen. Elliot Cooke was harshly critical of Fort Lawton's handling of the riot and murder. Cooke's report, however, was never made available to the defendants or to the public. After a five-week trial, twenty-eight men were found guilty, two of them convicted of manslaughter.

The body of Guglielmo Olivotto is still buried in Discovery Park, off the northeast corner of the Fort Lawton cemetery.

LOCATIONS OF BUILDINGS & EVENTS AT FORT LAWTON, 1944

- ① Hospital No. 2
- ② Guglielmo Olivotto's grave
- ③ Court-martial building
- ④ Hospital No. 1
- ⑤ Officer's barracks
- ⑥ Military Police barracks
- ⑦ Office of the Provost Marshal
- ⑧ African American barracks
- ⑨ Italian Service Unit barracks
- ⑩ Guglielmo Olivotto's body discovered



HENRY WARE LAWTON



9TH CALVARY BUFFALO SOLDIERS AT FORT LAWTON

- 1899 FORT LAWTON CONSTRUCTED
- 1900 9TH CALVARY BUFFALO SOLDIERS QUARTERED AT FORT LAWTON
- 1943 MASS SURRENDER OF ITALIANS & GERMANS IN NORTH AFRICA
- 1944 FEB. 21: BASIC TRAINING BEGINS FOR 650TH & 651ST PORT COS.
- 1944 JUNE 6: D-DAY
- 1944 JULY 10: INSURRECTION AT FORT LAWTON BY FASCIST POWs
- 1944 AUG. 12: PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT VISITS SEATTLE
- 1944 AUG. 14: RIOT AT FORT LAWTON
- 1944 AUG. 15: BODY OF GUGLIELMO OLIVOTTO DISCOVERED



D-DAY LANDING, NORMANDY



GUGLIELMO OLIVOTTO

- 1944 SEP. 16: BRIG. GEN. ELLIOT COOKE BEGINS I.G. INVESTIGATION
- 1944 OCT. 13: COL. HARRY BRANSON RELIEVED OF COMMAND
- 1944 OCT. 27: LEON JAWORSKI FILES CRIMINAL CHARGES
- 1944 NOV. 16: FORT LAWTON COURT-MARTIAL BEGINS
- 1944 DEC. 16: CLOSING ARGUMENTS
- 1944 DEC. 18: SENTENCING OF 27 DEFENDANTS
- 1945 JAN. 4: PVT. CLYDE LOMAX COURT-MARTIALED
- 1945 APR. 19: BOARD OF REVIEW UPHOLDS FORT LAWTON VERDICT
- 1945 AUG. 14: V-J DAY; WORLD WAR II ENDS



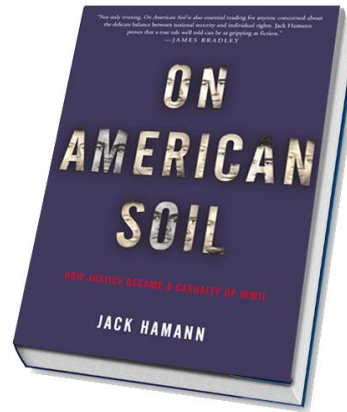
COL. LEON JAWORSKI



SITE OF LYNCHING



V-J DAY, TIMES SQUARE



ON AMERICAN SOIL

HOW JUSTICE BECAME A CASUALTY OF WWII

by Jack Hamann

“Not only **riveting**, ON AMERICAN SOIL is also essential reading for anyone concerned about the delicate balance between national security and individual rights. Jack Hamann proves that a true tale well told can be as **gripping** as fiction.”

-James Bradley, author
Flags of Our Fathers and *Flyboys*

“Jack Hamann has crafted an impressive debut book that is painstakingly researched and documented but also manages to be an **enthralling** read.”

-Seattle Post-Intelligencer

“**Razor-sharp** ... Hamann’s lively narrative and incisive commentary raise the standard for investigational writing.”

-Library Journal

JACK HAMANN lives in Seattle, where he is an author and journalist. Jack’s career spans twenty-five years, including a decade as a network correspondent and documentary producer for CNN and PBS. His work has earned dozens of national and international journalism honors, including ten regional Emmy awards.

Jack is the author of *On American Soil: How Justice Became a Casualty of WWII* (Algonquin Books, 2005), a nonfiction investigative account of one of the largest and most controversial events in American civil rights history. *On American Soil* was named 2006 Book of the Year by Investigative Reporters & Editors. Barnes & Noble selected *On American Soil* for its prestigious “Discover Great New Writers” program, chosen from new books around the world. The book was also named a “Top Ten Pick” by the American Booksellers Association and The History Channel.

The publication of *On American Soil* prompted Congressman Jim McDermott to introduce legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives, demanding that the Secretary of the U.S. Army reopen the Fort Lawton case. The bill prompted the House Armed Services Committee to conduct an expedited review of the cases and create a system for overturning dishonorable discharges of 27 defendants.

A graduate of UCLA (B.A. Economics, 1976) and the University of Oregon School of Law (J.D., 1980), Jack and his wife, Leslie, have two grown children. They coach girls’ volleyball at Garfield High School in Seattle.

For more, please visit www.jackhamann.com.

Discovery Park

Fort Lawton’s 1944

Riot and Lynching

Seattle’s Forgotten History



HEADSTONE FOR ITALIAN PRIVATE GUGLIELMO OLIVOTTO, FORT LAWTON CEMETERY